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RUEHTU/AMEMBASSY TUNIS PRIORITY 4539
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RUEHJM/AMCONSUL JERUSALEM PRIORITY 9041
RHMFISS/CDR USCENTCOM MACDILL AFB FL PRIORITY
RHMFISS/COMSOCEUR VAIHINGEN GE PRIORITY
RHMFIUU/COMSIXTHFLT PRIORITY

UNCLAS TEL AVIV 000325

SIPDIS

STATE FOR NEA, NEA/IPA, NEA/PPD

WHITE HOUSE FOR PRESS OFFICE, SIT ROOM
NSC FOR NEA STAFF

SECDEF WASHDC FOR USDP/ASD-PA/ASD-ISA
HQ USAF FOR XXXX
DA WASHDC FOR SASA
JOINT STAFF WASHDC FOR PA
CDR USCENTCOM MACDILL AFB FL FOR POLAD/USIA ADVISOR
COMSOCEUR VAIHINGEN GE FOR PAO/POLAD
COMSIXTHFLT FOR 019

JERUSALEM ALSO ICD
LONDON ALSO FOR HKANONA AND POL
PARIS ALSO FOR POL
ROME FOR MFO

SIPDIS
E.O. 12958: N/A
TAGS: [OPRC](#) [KMDR](#) [IS](#)

SUBJECT: ISRAEL MEDIA REACTION

SUBJECTS COVERED IN THIS REPORT:

Mideast

Key stories in the media:

The top story over the weekend was the wounding of two brothers from Sderot, aged eight and 19, on Saturday night. One of the younger brother's legs was amputated. Right-wing politicians and some

ministers have called for drastic measures to be taken in response. Construction and Housing Minister Meir Sheetrit (Kadima) was widely quoted as saying at the weekly cabinet meeting that Israel should "raze" a Gaza neighborhood after warning its residents. On Sunday Ha'aretz reported that PM Ehud Olmert told visiting Austrian FM Ursula Plassnik last Wednesday: "I am fending off heavy pressure to launch a major ground operation in Gaza," and he added that hopefully through sanctions an escalation can be avoided. Leading media further quoted the Prime Minister and Defense Minister Barak as saying over the last few days that Israel needs to continue its preparations for a large-scale military operation in the Gaza Strip, but there is no point in rushing into one. Ha'aretz and other media reported that the IDF and the Shin Bet are preparing to step up assassinations against key Hamas figures in the Gaza Strip, though the renewed campaign is not likely, at this stage, to include members of the Hamas political leadership. Yediot reported that Hamas's "chief of staff," Muhammad (or Ahmed) Jaabari, went underground (according to Israel Radio, Hamas PM Ismail Haniyeh did so as well). On Sunday, media reported that several ministers, including FM Livni and Minister Ami Ayalon, support bringing international troops into the Gaza Strip. Israel Hayom quoted Livni as saying recently: "No organization is more appropriate than NATO to lead this process."

All media reported on protests by Sderot residents. On Sunday demonstrations took place at the entrance to Jerusalem, and other ones are expected to happen today in Jerusalem and the Tel Aviv area.

The Jerusalem Post and other media reported that politicians on the Right called upon Shas to leave the government immediately after The Jerusalem Post revealed on Sunday that in secret talks, FM Tzipi Livni had made concessions to the Palestinians on Jerusalem.

On Sunday Ha'aretz reported that senior IDF officials told the newspaper that Hizbullah has managed to deploy large numbers of Katyusha rockets and anti-tank missiles in southern Lebanon and that these weapons in Shi'ite villages have been undetected by UN observers. The sources were further quoted as saying that Hizbullah is reluctant to use the weapons after the 2006 war and that Israel's deterrence has not been diminished.

Leading media reported that on Sunday PM Olmert flew to Germany, where he will meet the mediator in the Gilad Shalit prisoner swap.

Ha'aretz reported that the U.S. administration is urging Israel to engage Egypt in immediate dialogue to resolve the border issue. The U.S. wants Israel to show some flexibility on Egypt's demand to add 750 soldiers to its border force, as well as to agree to Palestinian PM Salam Fayyad's proposal to take over responsibility for the Israel-Gaza Strip border. Ha'aretz said that Assistant Secretary of State for Near Eastern Affairs David Welch visited Egypt, Israel and the PA last week and held talks on the situation in the Gaza Strip. The newspaper reported that Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice is expected to visit the region herself shortly. On Sunday The Jerusalem Post quoted a senior PA official in Ramallah as saying that the purpose of Rice's visit is to prevent the collapse of peace talks between Israel and the PA.

Ha'aretz reported that for the first time in months, the IDF imposed a full closure on Jenin after receiving a tip that a suicide bomber planned to use it as a base to attack an Israeli target.

On Sunday Ha'aretz reported that Sen. John McCain is using the "Israel tool" to woo Conservative republicans.

Media cited doubts expressed by Israeli demographers regarding the accuracy of data published over the weekend by Ramallah's Central Bureau of Statistics that the Palestinian population had grown by 870,000 in the West Bank over the past decade.

Over the weekend IDF Radio reported that last Wednesday Sheikh Abu-Hader Jabri and Haj Akram Abu-Sneineh, the heads of the two largest Palestinian clans in Hebron, met with Zvi Katzover, the mayor of Kiryat Arba, as well as the heads of Jewish settlers in Hebron. Both sides declared the meeting as one of reconciliation.

"We don't see you as settlers but as residents," Jabri was quoted as telling his Jewish interlocutors.

Major media reported that on Sunday the government approved an ambitious 870-million shekel (approx. \$241 million) plan designed to help absorption of Ethiopian immigrants into Israeli society.

Ha'aretz, Yediot, and Maariv reported that the Jerusalem District Court ruled on Sunday that alleged child molester Avrohom Mondrowitz can be extradited to the U.S. for offenses committed between 1980 and 1984.

Mideast:

Summary:

The independent, left-leaning Ha'aretz editorialized: "The solution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict is political, and should always be pursued. At the same time, Israel must prove that the blood of its citizens cannot be forfeited -- so that in the future, its neighbors will abide by the agreements to which they have committed."

Senior columnist Nahum Barnea wrote on page one of the mass-circulation, pluralist Yediot Aharonot: "It is doubtful whether the Olmert government was prepared to decide on even one war. But it was fated to decide on two."

The conservative, independent Jerusalem Post editorialized: "What Israel really needs, and what Hamas fears most, is not NATO troops, but Western governments unequivocally backing Israel's right to self-defense. This means backing Israel when it holds Hamas leaders accountable and when it demands that Egypt control its own border. This is how Hamas can be defeated without war, while sparing the lives of many Israelis and Palestinians."

Meretz-Yahad Party Chairman Yossi Beilin wrote in the independent Israel Hayom: "If Hamas honors [a] cease-fire agreement fully and prevents Qassam rockets, mortar shells and other harm to Israel, we will refrain from going into the Gaza Strip and carrying out targeted killings. If it does not keep its word, we will also be released from our promise."

The nationalist, Orthodox Makor Rishon-Hatzofe editorialized: "The Prime Minister's moderate policy leads to further withdrawals."
Block Quotes:

I. "Restraint Is Not Possible"

The independent, left-leaning Ha'aretz editorialized (2/11): "The firing of Qassam rockets against Sderot and the nearby kibbutzim is not stopping and is extracting a heavy price in terms of fear and blood. Responsibility for the shooting from the Gaza Strip, which has been going on for seven years -- both before and after the disengagement from the Strip -- falls on the Palestinians. Were it not for the shooting, Israel would not respond. For the past eight months Hamas has ruled the Gaza Strip alone, and it is no longer possible to explain away the shooting as due to a lack of control over rogue organizations. The time has come for the Palestinians to ask themselves and their leadership about the direction they are heading.... The disengagement was not a mistake, but a necessary move of vision and hope. Hamas undermined the hope for a shared future and opted to preserve, as its declared policy, its 'resistance' to the existence of Israel, and by extension continue its path of violence. While Israel is trying to correct its historic error of settling in the heart of the Palestinian population by converging into old-new borders of a more ethical democracy, the Palestinians elected Hamas, which is not willing to compromise. The Qassam attacks are not proof that the disengagement failed, but that the Hamas rule is leading the Palestinians into a new round of an unnecessary war.... The solution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict is political, and should always be pursued. At the same time, Israel must prove that the blood of its citizens cannot be forfeited -- so that in the future, its neighbors will abide by the agreements to which they have committed."

II. "Back in the Spring"

Senior columnist Nahum Barnea wrote on page one of the mass-circulation, pluralist Yediot Aharonot (2/11): "It could very well be that we are fated both to fight Hamas and to talk to it, the question is only in which order: do we first fight them and then talk or do we first talk with them first and then fight them? With that being the situation, the little that is required of the politicians is to be truthful with themselves and their voters. On Sunday Binyamin Netanyahu stood in front of a microphone and blamed the situation that has evolved on disengagement. He forgot that he served as one of the senior ministers in the government that decided on disengagement, and that he supported disengagement in the decisive vote in the Knesset.... In another few weeks ... the security cabinet will have to decide whether there isn't any other choice but to send massive numbers of IDF troops into the Gaza Strip. To hear it from Netanyahu, he makes it sound like a field trip to see the anemones near Kibbutz Saad [in the northern Negev]. In real life the decision will be hard as hell to make. It is doubtful whether the Olmert government was prepared to decide on even one war. But it was fated to decide on two."

III. "How to Beat Hamas"

The conservative, independent Jerusalem Post editorialized (2/11): "There are two things that Hamas wants, and two more that it really fears. Hamas would love a repeat of the 'humanitarian crisis,' in which the international community sides against Israel for slightly reducing electricity supplies by cutting fuel to Gaza. Israel was completely justified in taking this step, but Europe and the U.S., which should have exposed Hamas's ploy, acted as dupes of the terrorist regime and blamed, or did not sufficiently defend, Israel.... The other option Hamas hopes Israel will take is to invade Gaza in force.... This brings us to the two options that Hamas does not want and which Israel should pursue. The first is to stop holding the 'political' leadership of Hamas immune.... The second option that is long overdue is to publicly demand that Egypt do what it takes to shut down the weapons flow into Gaza.... It has become fashionable to talk of stationing NATO troops in Gaza. What Israel really needs, and what Hamas fears most, is not NATO troops, but Western governments unequivocally backing Israel's right to self-defense. This means backing Israel when it holds Hamas leaders accountable and when it demands that Egypt control its own border. This is how Hamas can be defeated without war, while sparing the lives of many Israelis and Palestinians."

IV. "It Cannot Go On Like This"

Meretz-Yahad Party Chairman Yossi Beilin wrote in the independent Israel Hayom (2/10): "The Israeli government is responsible for what is happening in the western Negev.... The correct thing to have done would have been to reach a peace agreement with the Palestinians that included Gaza. We should have reached one on May 4, 1999, and we missed that opportunity. Sharon's agreement, and Olmert's after him, to allow Hamas to run in the Palestinian elections and accept the American dictate, from a naive perception of democracy, was a terrible mistake, and Hamas's takeover of Gaza pushed off the chances of reaching peace. A large-scale operation in Gaza will not stop the Qassam rockets, and will claim victims on both sides.... Out of its own interest, Hamas wants to reach a cease-fire with Israel. This is also our interest. It is possible that Hamas wants to buy time, but Israel needs time until it has protection from the rockets. If Hamas honors the cease-fire agreement fully and prevents Qassam rockets, mortar shells and other harm to Israel, we will refrain from going into the Gaza Strip and carrying out targeted killings. If it does not keep its word, we will also be released from our promise. The price is minimal, and the chance for calm is better than any other alternative."

V. "Simply Resisting Pressure Will Lead to a Withdrawal"

The nationalist, Orthodox Makor Rishon-Hatzofe editorialized (2/11): "[Prime Minister Ehud Olmert] is again avoiding to fully confront the Gaza terrorists.... Olmert's policy does not bring us any closer to future peace. Its result is the opposite. Over the past weekend 40 Qassam rockets were launched at Sderot, injuring many people and causing material damage.... Olmert believes that the international

arena will validate his policy. However, he found out during a conversation with the Austrian Foreign Minister that his counterparts are not satisfied with that. They demand that he make bigger concessions to the Palestinians -- in other words, the Europeans want Israel to declare a withdrawal to the '67 borders. They believe that this is a necessary condition for pushing peace regional peace forward. At the end of the conversation Olmert ignored the [Austrian] Foreign Minister. In fact, the Prime Minister's moderate policy leads to further withdrawals -- but Olmert continues to turn a blind eye. We have to be aware of this situation, as we contend with the Prime Minister's remarks on containing pressure, instead of on embarking on a military operation."

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